



(U) Was Shooting for the Moon, But Landed at NSA Instead

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(U) I grew up in Huntsville, Alabama, the son of a Boeing engineer working on NASA's Apollo program to put Americans on the Moon before the Russians got there. As an eight-year-old living in that environment, I may have known more about microgravity, atmospheric reentry and auxiliary power units than I did about skateboards and baseball cards. I was probably among the first people outside NASA who knew that Apollo 8 would send the first astronauts to orbit the moon, and that Apollo 10 would be a full-scale rehearsal for Armstrong and Aldrin's landing on Tranquility Base a few months later. With that background, I was fully committed to becoming a pilot and astronaut.

(U) As is so often the case with dreams, however, they live on quietly within the psyche while reality takes over. I went on to pursue other endeavors, and ventured into geology. I also sought to brush up my skills in German and I even learned some Russian along the way -- just to be different. With a career at NSA lurking in my future, I had no idea at the time how different "different" would prove to be.

(U) Learning German had laid the groundwork that made picking up Russian a comparative snap, and I decided to study abroad. I applied to study Russian at a university in Bavaria (Wuerzburg), not as an exchange student, but as "regular" student from overseas. That's right, I took on the task of learning Russian with the Germans -- no English allowed. Those 13 months in Germany were certainly the most challenging, but also the most rewarding, of my several years of college.

(U) It was during this period that I first learned of the existence of the National Security Agency (I read about the place in a German periodical) and the smattering of potential truth contained in that article made me want to learn more. Upon graduation, my interview with a recruiter and application for a job at NSA comprised the sum of my job search.

(S) Fast-forward 19 years to the present, here I am working as a software developer and support technician on a foreign-language dictionary project. When "one thing leads to another," there's no telling where you will wind up!

(S) But the bulk of my career while working as a linguist was spent in the old Manned Space Operations Center, adjunct to DEFSMAC, keeping track of activities on the Soviet space station. So I did, in a manner of speaking, achieve my original dream of a career related to space flight. And this happened in a way that almost certainly would have been impossible anywhere other than at NSA.

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